

**Preliminary Amendment of U.S. National Stage for International Application  
PCT/EP99/09404 filed December 2, 1999**

(b) from 0.01 to 400 ppm of a hardness stabilizer selected from the group consisting of inorganic polyphosphates, phosphonic acids, aminoethylene phosphonic acids, phosphoric acid esters, phosphonocarboxylic acids, polycarboxylics, and mixtures thereof.--

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--12. (New) The composition according to claim 11, wherein the aqueous silica sol comprises amorphous silica having an average particle size of from 1 to 150 nm and a specific surface value of from 50 to 700 m<sup>2</sup>/g.--

--13. (New) The composition according to claim 11, wherein the aqueous silica sol comprises amorphous silica having an average particle size of from 5 to 70 nm and a specific surface value of from 50 to 700 m<sup>2</sup>/g.--

--14. (New) The composition according to claim 11, wherein the aqueous silica sol comprises amorphous silica particles having surface-stabilizing hydroxyl groups.--

--15. (New) The composition according to claim 12, wherein the aqueous silica sol comprises amorphous silica particles having surface-stabilizing hydroxyl groups.--

--16. (New) The composition according to claim 11, wherein the hardness stabilizer is selected from the group consisting of aminotris(methylenephosphonic acid), 1-hydroxyethane-1,1-diphosphonic acid, phosphonobutane tricarboxylic acid, polyacrylic acid and mixtures thereof.--

--17. (New) The composition according to claim 11, wherein the hardness stabilizer is present in an amount of from 0.1 to 200 ppm.--

--18. (New) The composition according to claim 11, wherein the hardness stabilizer is present in an amount of from 1 to 100 ppm.--

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--19. (New) The composition according to claim 12, wherein the hardness stabilizer is selected from the group consisting of aminotris(methylenephosphonic acid), 1-hydroxyethane-1,1-diphosphonic acid, phosphonobutane tricarboxylic acid, polyacrylic acid and mixtures thereof.--

--20. (New) The composition according to claim 12, wherein the hardness stabilizer is present in an amount of from 0.1 to 200 ppm.--

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--21. (New) A method of sealing and/or consolidating loose and/or permeable materials, said method comprising:

(a) providing a material to be treated selected from the group consisting of rocks, mantle rock, soils, and mixtures thereof;

(b) contacting the material with an aqueous silica sol; and

(c) contacting the material with a hardness stabilizer selected from the group consisting of inorganic polyphosphates, phosphonic acids, aminoethylene phosphonic acids, phosphoric acid esters, phosphonocarboxylic acids, polycarboxylics, and mixtures thereof.--

--22. (New) The method according to claim 21, wherein the material is contacted with the aqueous silica sol and the hardness stabilizer simultaneously in the form of a water-based composition comprising both the aqueous silica sol and the hardness stabilizer.--

--23. (New) The method according to claim 21, wherein the material is contacted with the aqueous silica sol, and subsequently contacted with the hardness stabilizer by adding the hardness stabilizer to the aqueous silica sol.--

--24. (New) The method according to claim 21, wherein the aqueous silica sol comprises amorphous silica having an average particle size of from 1 to 150 nm and a specific surface value of from 50 to 700 m<sup>2</sup>/g.--

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--25. (New) The method according to claim 21, wherein the aqueous silica sol comprises amorphous silica having an average particle size of from 5 to 70 nm and a specific surface value of from 50 to 700 m<sup>2</sup>/g.--

--26. (New) The method according to claim 21, wherein the aqueous silica sol comprises amorphous silica particles having surface-stabilizing hydroxyl groups.--

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--27. (New) The method according to claim 21, wherein the hardness stabilizer is selected from the group consisting of aminotris(methylenephosphonic acid), 1-hydroxyethane-1,1-diphosphonic acid, phosphonobutane tricarboxylic acid, polyacrylic acid and mixtures thereof.--

--28. (New) The method according to claim 22, wherein the hardness stabilizer is present in the composition in an amount of from 0.01 to 400 ppm.--

--29. (New) The method according to claim 23, wherein the hardness stabilizer is added to the aqueous silica sol such that the hardness stabilizer is present in the sol in an amount of from 0.01 to 400 ppm.--

--30. (New) The method according to claim 22, wherein the hardness stabilizer is present in the composition in an amount of from 0.1 to 200 ppm.--

--31. (New) The method according to claim 23, wherein the hardness stabilizer is added to the aqueous silica sol such that the hardness stabilizer is present in the sol in an amount of from 0.1 to 200 ppm.--

--32. (New) A method of sealing and/or consolidating loose and/or permeable materials, said method comprising:

(a) providing a material to be treated selected from the group consisting

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of rocks, mantle rock, soils, and mixtures thereof, wherein the material is in contact with water containing  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  ions; and

AG (b) contacting the material with a composition comprising: (i) an aqueous silica sol, wherein the composition contains  $\text{SiO}_2$  in an amount of from 2 to 40% by weight based upon the weight of the composition; and (ii) from 0.1 to 200 ppm of a hardness stabilizer selected from the group consisting of aminotris(methylenephosphonic acid), 1-hydroxyethane-1,1-diphosphonic acid, phosphonobutane tricarboxylic acid, polyacrylic acid and mixtures thereof.--

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Please cancel claims 1-10, without prejudice.